



*Stephanie Rawlings-Blake*  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

*Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman*

### STAFF REPORT



*Thomas J. Stosur*  
Director

**July 10, 2014**

**REQUEST:** City Council Bill #14-0408/ Urban Renewal –Fells Point Waterfront- Amendment

For the purpose of amending the Urban Renewal Plan for Fells Point Waterfront to change the location for the promenade that is to provide public access for Disposition Lot 22.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approval

**STAFF:** Tamara Woods

**PETITIONER:** The Administration (Department of Housing and Community Development)

**OWNERS:** Mayor and City Council

#### **SITE/GENERAL AREA**

Site Conditions: The subject site is within the Fells Point neighborhood. It is a pier property located at 1715 Thames Street.

General Area: The general project area lies within the Fells Point neighborhood, which is a waterfront neighborhood situated between Harbor East and Canton. The neighborhood is a mixed use neighborhood that has one of the city's most successful commercial areas, as well as, single-family and multi-family residential units. In addition, Fells Point is also a designated local historic neighborhood featuring many contributing historic properties including the Recreation Pier building.

#### **CONFORMITY TO PLANS**

The proposed development plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically: LIVE Goal 1: Build Human and Social Capital by Strengthening Neighborhoods; Objective 2: Strategically Redevelop Vacant Properties Throughout the City; and Goal 2: Elevate the Design and Quality of the City's Built Environment. Objective 4: Protect and Enhance the Preservation of Baltimore's Historic Buildings and Neighborhoods.

#### **HISTORY**

- Ordinance # 07-569, established the Fells Point Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan, also repealed Ordinance # 75-999, which established the Fells Point Urban Renewal Area.
- Ordinance # 07-555, approved by the Mayor and City Council in December 2007, for the establishment of the Fells Point Historic District.

## ANALYSIS

The proposed site for redevelopment is the Recreation Pier in historic Fells Point that was originally built in 1914 as a commercial pier. It also had recreation facilities, including a ballroom. The recreation Pier served as a landing point for thousands of new immigrants processed across the river at the Locust Point immigration station. The current proposal will include the rebuilding of the Pier itself, the renovation of the Head House, and the construction of a luxury hotel that incorporates the existing building on the Pier. The proposed hotel would consist of approximately 122 keys and would include on-site amenities such as a restaurant and a pool. The property is located within the Fells Point Historic District, which is a designated local historic district and is also within a National Register Historic District.

This project requires several approvals before it can move forward: an amendment to the Fells Point Urban Renewal Plan to accommodate a change in location of the public promenade, CHAP design approval, flood plain and other State approvals through the Army Corps of Engineers. Baltimore Housing is currently working with the developer to dispose of 1715 Thames Street. On June 11, 2014 the Board of Estimates approved an amendment to the Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) that would provide for the sale of the Recreation Pier building to the developer, 1715 Thames Street, LLC.

The creation of a public promenade along the City's waterfront is of the utmost importance in making sure the public has opportunities for access to the waterfront. One of the three stated objectives of the Fells Point Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan is "to maximize public access to the waterfront through public parks and a promenade along the waterfront in private development." In addition to this Waterfront Area Controls are provided with more specific requirements for Pedestrian Access and Promenade Standards that speak to the siting of the promenade and design of lighting, benches and paving. Though Disposition Lot 22 is exempt from the Waterfront Area Controls, there is a requirement to provide a public promenade that would be in keeping with the intent that visual enjoyment of the water be created and/or preserved.

The original plans for the Pier redevelopment called for the construction of a portion of the waterfront promenade through the middle of the Head House and Pier. As plans for the hotel advanced, it became clear that this was not a physically feasible plan. The Maryland Historical Trust believes that the expansion of the existing pier to accommodate public access along the length of the pier would impact the character of the pier by altering the relationship between the working warehouse space and the water thus having negative impacts on the ability to utilize Sustainable Communities Tax Credits. To that end, the City has agreed to work with the developer to create an alternate promenade location along Thames Street from Ann Street to South Broadway that would be in keeping with the recommendation from the Maryland Historic Trust that Thames Street be used for project enhancements that would increase public access to the waterfront.

The bill provision of the Fells Point Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan amendment is to change the location of the public access for Disposition Lot 22 (Recreation Pier building). The current language of the Urban Renewal Plan requires that a promenade for public access to the open space on the south end of the pier be provided. The proposed amendment would change that requirement so that a public access promenade for Disposition Lot 22 be provided at the northern boundary of the site.

**Notifications:**

In advance of a hearing on this matter, staff notified the following organizations: Fells Prospect, Inc., Fells Point Community Organization, Fells Point Residents Association, The Preservation Society, Waterfront Coalition, Douglass Place Community Association, Fells Point Task Force, Fells Point Main Street, Fells Point Homeowners' Association, and the Upper Fells Point Improvement Association.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas J. Stosur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" and last name "Stosur" clearly distinguishable.

**Thomas J. Stosur**  
**Director**